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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

This issue of *Leaven* features the eighth century B.C.E. writing Micah, and is based to a large extent on select classes and sermons given at the 2007 Abilene Christian University Lectureship. Here, we briefly introduce the prophet and the writing. A more extended introduction follows in Stuart Love's article entitled "Introducing and Reading Micah."

Micah was among the earliest of the "writing" prophets that also included Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. Even though his home was Moresheth-gath (1.1, 14), a village located in the foothills of Judah southwest of Jerusalem and a satellite community to the larger city of Gath, his sermons were delivered mostly to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. His peasant ties most probably made him acutely sensitive to the suffering of the poor and powerless, who are often mentioned in his oracles.

His ministry covered at least portions of the life spans of three Judean kings—Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, who reigned one after another from about 742 to 686 B.C.E. Put in other words, his prophetic activity encompassed both the fall of Samaria's northern kingdom (1.2–7) and the subsequent grim situation of the southern kingdom, Judah. Micah witnessed the devastating advancement of the Assyrian Empire from about 722 to 701 B.C.E. His oracles substantiated the devastation begun by Sargon in Philistia to the besiegement of Jerusalem by Sennacherib (1.8–16). Consider the following:

1. In 722 the northern kingdom (Israel) was conquered.
2. In 711 the Philistine city of Ashdod was besieged.
3. In the period of Sennacherib's invasion of the southern kingdom (Judah) in 701, forty-six fortified towns fell to the Assyrians. (A partial list of these communities, a number of which were near Micah's home, is found in Micah 1.10–15.)

The prophet's sermons were concerned mostly with ethical issues. Judah's sins, Micah affirmed, would inevitably lead to the southern kingdom's ruin. Zion would "be plowed as a field." Jerusalem would "become a heap of ruins"—and "the mountain of the house a wooded height" (3.12; see Jer 26.18–19). Unlike Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah (a century later) believed the holy city was at risk. Consequently, it appears that Micah did not support the David-Zion tradition, with its belief in the inviolability of Jerusalem. He was more interested in the conditional covenant with Moses and Israel than with the unconditional covenant with David and Jerusalem (2 Sam 7; Ps 89.3–4, 19–37). Judith E. Sanderson states:

Micah preaches that David's city will, indeed, fall to the enemy, precisely because Judah is not obeying the terms of the covenant with Israel, delivered through Moses. That covenant was established after the liberation of Israel from slavery; it requires Israel to maintain justice precisely because it experienced such terrible injustice in Egypt.¹

1. See Judith E. Sanderson, "Micah Introduction," *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1303.

For Micah, the core of corruption resided among the religious and political officials of Jerusalem. Priests, prophets and judges were engaged in socioeconomic wrongdoing. Micah's cry for justice in chapters 2, 3 and 6 seems to parallel Amos' call for the practice of righteousness and justice.

However, Micah believed that the just punishment of a disobedient Israel would be followed by the restoration of God's remnant people. Ultimately, Jerusalem would be exalted with the restoration of the temple and the Davidic monarchy (4.1–2, 7–10, 13; 5.2–3). Thus, the final word was not divine destruction but the Lord's forgiveness and hope. Micah saw Jerusalem in the future as the place for the life of the nations and a location to carry forward a universal peace (4.1–5). The book ends with a message of hope of a future restoration (7.8–20).

STUART LOVE's article opens the issue by introducing Micah and helping us read the book in one setting. Three questions are asked: (1) Who was Micah? (2) When did he do his preaching? (3) What was the social and political backdrop of Micah's ministry? By reading Micah in one setting we can better capture the thrust of the book. Next, **TIMOTHY WILLIS** demonstrates how New Testament passages on social justice like James 1.27, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" actually were "a continuation of an appeal from God that begins in the OT." Specifically, Willis addresses Micah's words to act justly and love mercy (Micah 6.8). The next three articles are keynote sermons delivered at the ACU Lectures. The first, delivered by **FRED ASARE**, pursues Micah's message that Israel's wound is incurable (Micah 1.1–9). In doing so, Asare asks, what is the relevance of preaching done by outsiders to people who see themselves as children of God? This, he believes, was a part of Micah's challenge. **JAY HAWKINS**, from an entirely different perspective than that of Asare, takes up the theme of hope in the passage that affirms, "I will surely gather you" (Micah 2.12–13). How do we live our lives when we cannot fathom what is happening presently? The third sermon, by **JERRY TAYLOR**, explores the question, "What does the Lord require?" (Micah 6.1–8). At the heart of Taylor's message is a warning to all engaged in the pursuit of carnal, worldly power: God condemns the use of power that leads to control and domination of others. **JOHN T. WILLIS**, truly an authority on the book of Micah, provides a brief resource reading guide. We conclude our Micah materials with a liturgical reading by **LEE MAGNESS** entitled, "And What Does the Lord Require?" Magness' dramatic reading features the paraphrased words of the prophet read by two voices.

The issue then broadens its scope to a biblical theology word study and an article on the book of Hosea. **THOMAS H. OLBRICHT** explores the meaning of the expression "the steadfast love of the Lord." It is nothing less than a great affirmation of the love of God. **R. MARK SHIPP** explores with great care "The Message of Hosea 1–3: A Harlot's Wages." This fine study was presented as a two-class series at the ACU Lectures.

Finally, moving in an entirely different vein, the issue ends with an article by **WAYMON R. HINSON** and **DAMON PARKER** entitled, "Sexual Addiction: Problems and Solutions for the Christian Community." Hinson and Parker analyze the problem of sexual addiction in our churches.

Continue to pray for *Leaven*. Future issues include *Theology and Science* and *Restoration Emphases in World Missions*.

